

# The Importance of Hospital and Nursing School Libraries to the Nursing Profession

BY AMY FRANCES BROWN, R.N., PH.D.

*Consultant and Instructor in In-service Education  
Moline Public Hospital School of Nursing,  
Moline, Illinois*

GOOD library service is a *sine qua non* to the preservation and dissemination of nursing knowledge and to the forward march of nursing as a science. All serious scholars realize this, and it is the task of medical librarians and teachers of nursing to bring to students some appreciation of the values of hospital and nursing school libraries.

Those who make use of hospital and nursing school libraries might be divided into three groups. The services to those in each of these different groups differs from the services needed by individuals in each of the other two groups. Of the three groups the first, a small group, consists of the individuals on the teaching staff who are well acquainted with varied library facilities and resources. This group includes particularly those on the medical and nursing staffs who do some professional writing. The second group includes those who are moderately facile in the use of the library: most of the instructors and a great many of the students. The third group consists of those who lack library skills and read only when required to do so. This group includes a disheartening proportion of students. Now we might consider how individuals become members of one or another of these groups, and the kinds of services which the medical librarian may render to them.

The individuals in the first group, who have a rich fund of knowledge and varied skills related to utilization of library services, most likely derived these understandings and skills from favorable influences in both home and school. While the librarians of childrens' rooms in public libraries, rather than medical librarians, have the most to do with the development of early attitudes toward reading, it may be worthwhile to dwell for a moment on the ways in which a child comes to enjoy books and learns how to use them. Whether my own experience is typical, I do not know; at any rate, it will illustrate the points I wish to make.

One of my earliest memories is of sitting on my mother's lap while she read aloud to my brother and me from the poetry of Tennyson and Browning. Ob-

viously, when we were so small, we could not have comprehended the meaning of such poetry; but we enjoyed being read to, perhaps partly because of the expression of love in such an experience. We learned to like the rhythm of the poetry. This led in later years to an enjoyment of music, as well as of the rhythm in both poetry and good prose. When I was four-and-a-half years old, my brother had taught me all the words in his first grade reader before my mother knew that I had learned any words or letters. Having had this early start, I developed an increasing enjoyment of reading. One of my memories of grammar school days is that my mother regularly checked out from the public library every two weeks books for herself and books suitable for each of us. Thus, we were not limited to the library resources at home and at school, and learned early the use of books for both the acquisition of information and the happy use of leisure time. My family purchased a set of encyclopedias particularly suitable for children, a set which served us well from nursery school years through college years. On long winter evenings our family listened to mother reading aloud from well chosen books, both fiction and nonfiction.

When family influences are not so fortunate, greater responsibility is placed upon the teachers, and the establishment of adequate library facilities in the community becomes extremely important. Opportunity for increasing facility in the use of libraries should be included in courses in communication in grade school and in high school. But that this has not been so in the experience of all nurses is evident in the lack of ease with which nursing students, and even some nursing instructors, make use of library resources.

But let us return to consideration of the first group of users of hospital and nursing school libraries. The individual in this group seldom needs more orientation to a library than an explanation of any special services which are available. He knows that a good library affords bibliographic service to anyone who has either limited or extensive need for such service. For example, the reference librarian will be able to locate material which does not appear readily in the usual resources, such as the card file and the various reference guides. An example of the kind of reference service which is greatly appreciated by the serious student occurred several years ago when, because the nurses on our medical service were careless in their technic while caring for patients with viral hepatitis, it occurred to me that if we were to prepare some mimeographed material about the communicability of this disease, the information might impress upon the nurses the oral instructions which I and a member of the medical staff who was an authority on viral hepatitis had given from time to time. Accordingly, I asked the reference librarian whether she could locate some helpful recent references on viral hepatitis. She was greatly interested, and asked some questions about the kind of material that I was interested in finding. From our discussion, she learned that I was interested in material published within the last two years, with emphasis upon the treatment, and

was interested in case reports only if the article was based upon experience with a reasonable number of cases, say fifteen or more. To my delight, she presented me in two days with a two-page list of periodical references. The list included a number of periodicals with which I had no acquaintance. Thus, the list brought to my attention some excellent reference material that I should never have discovered by my own roaming through the library shelves. I was so grateful for the work she had done that I wanted to share the information with others and this carefully compiled list of references provided the idea of writing an article on viral hepatitis which was published in the *American Journal of Nursing* in 1950. One article led to another. The first was revised for publication in the second edition of my *Medical Nursing* in 1952. Later, by invitation I wrote an article on homologous serum hepatitis which was published in *Nursing World* in January, 1956. The contribution of the reference librarian\* who was so thorough and so prompt in her preparation of a working bibliography is evident.

Besides knowing of the reference services available, the individual who knows how to make full use of library resources is aware of the possibilities of interlibrary loans. A number of years ago, the American Nurses' Association began to publish lists of so-called studies in nursing and to tell how they might be purchased or borrowed. Later the responsibility for publishing similar lists was carried in turn by the *American Journal of Nursing*, *Nursing Outlook*, and *Nursing Research*. I have made it a practice to keep a file of such studies which I may wish to borrow in connection with either special interests in my teaching or the preparation of portions of my books. While it turns out that many of the studies listed prove, on careful reading, to be disappointing, still the practice of borrowing studies on interlibrary loans can be, at times, highly productive. The privilege of having a thesis or dissertation borrowed by simply giving the librarian the identifying information, and letting the library take care of the details of requesting the item, paying the postage, and returning the study, brings such resources as close as the nearest university library, and saves time and expense for the instructor.

In talking with many nursing instructors, I have found that only a small number are aware of the possibilities of interlibrary loan service between various medical libraries. This, then, is one kind of library service which medical librarians should call to the attention of that large proportion of instructors who are within the second group of users of library services. In this same group one often finds that the instructor, even though she may be a college graduate, lacks many of the essential concepts and skills in the use of textbooks and reference books. Perhaps it would be helpful for the medical librarian to present a series of in-service education programs for new members

\* Gladys Bartholow, Reference Librarian, Medical Library, State University of Iowa, Iowa City.

of the faculty. Instructors often make errors in listing references in study guides prepared for the use of students. For example, the reprint date is given, rather than the year of publication of a book. With the elementary matter of correctly listing references, one might mention that the student could use his time more effectively and with less frustration if the references are listed with the information needed for locating foremost. For example, to locate a periodical reference in the library, one needs in successive order, the name of the periodical, the date, and the pages. One can not locate a periodical reference quickly by knowing the name of the writer, unless one also knows the name of the periodical and is consulting the index of the particular periodical for the pages of the article. But one will frequently note that a long list of periodical references given to students by their instructor lists all periodical references by an alphabetical arrangement of the names of the author, the most frustrating way in which to try to locate periodical references, and one which wastes a great amount of time on the part of each student. Furthermore, the time the student spends in this way yields no positive learning of library skills or enjoyment in the use of the library. If the instructor has had so little experience in locating references herself that she is not able to list references in such a way as to facilitate the location of them, the librarian who spends so much of her time helping students locate assigned references may help both the teacher and the students by suggesting to the instructor more effective ways of listing references.

Both students and teachers who belong to the second group may need advice about the provisions and limitations of the use of copyrighted materials.

Both students and teachers should be given information about the ephemeral materials, such as pamphlets and posters. Especially in smaller nursing libraries, one often finds that the librarian maintains an excellent file of such materials. Such a file is most useful to the instructor and to the student when the materials are filed by familiar headings. For example, materials may be easily located if the headings are based upon the unit organization of the various courses in the school of nursing. The use of cross references to other headings increases the usefulness of the file. (A word of caution should be given against reliance upon the ephemeral materials which come as pamphlets from commercial firms. The pamphlets of some of the drug companies are strongly slanted toward the sales of particular products, and about the only good use which an instructor can make of much of this material is to clip the illustrations and file them away for future use.)

The services which the medical librarian is able to render to the school of nursing are increased if the librarian is a member of the instructional staff. The librarian should be kept well informed concerning curriculum changes, both the broad aspects of the program and the details of content for each of the courses. The librarian should be given, well in advance of their being given to students, the lists of suggested or required references for various courses. Since

instructors are often unaware of the extent to which the librarian can deepen and broaden the learning of students, the librarian should bring suggestions for doing so to the instructional staff.

Sometimes the purchasing of books by the school is under the direction of nursing instructors who are not fully aware of the ways in which the library budget may be used most effectively. For instance, there are schools of nursing in which the library resources are meager, but where much money is expended in providing books for each student. This is an unfortunate practice. There is a tendency to consider the price of a book as more significant than the content; the old edition is sometimes not replaced when a new edition of the book is available; the student is limited in the number of books available for her use. The student never learns the proper use of books so long as the book is the property of the school and must be returned to the school upon completion of the course.

In other cases, while the school does not provide the textbooks for students, an effort is made to provide a sufficient number of copies of each text that it is not necessary for the student to purchase a textbook for each course. Thus, there may be from three to six copies of one particular title. It would be much better use of library funds to provide three to six different books on the particular subject. It was learned years ago in the accrediting program of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools that the number of volumes in the library is much less significant in evaluating library resources than the number of separate titles and the kinds of books provided. In an excellent medical library which serves both a large medical school and one of the largest schools of nursing in this country, it has proved to be good policy in general to order no more than two copies of any particular book or at most three copies except in special instances. With this policy, it has been possible over a number of years to provide adequate service. The school admits one hundred twenty medical students and about the same number of student nurses each year. Since good service can be rendered to such a large number of readers with this policy, there would seem to be little need in the usual nursing library for the purchase of more than one copy of any particular title. Rather, students should be expected to spend a reasonable amount of their own money to build an adequate personal library of professional books, and the money available for library expenditures should be used for maintaining an up-to-date library rich in its variety.

We have considered two groups of library users, those who have rather unusual skills in the use of library resources, and, in the second group, individuals with ordinary skills and understandings in the use of library resources. Now let us turn to the third group, which includes the students who lack library skills and read only when required to do so. In these days of mass entertainment media, we are threatened with an increase in the number of high school gradu-

ates whose total recreational and intellectual program has been in the realm of passive participation. A preponderance of passive entertainment stunts the imagination, and fosters mental laziness. A survey of the television habits and the effects of such habits in students in grades four through twelve was reported in 1957 by *The Register*, diocesan paper of the Diocese of Peoria. In one class of 24 pupils, 21 pupils reported spending six or seven hours a day watching television. Some of the children's programs set examples of very poor English, as well as unfortunate behavior patterns for children to follow. It may be assumed that homes which permit children to spend most of their out of school time watching television are homes without much in the way of library resources. In the last several years, I have been in a number of homes in which there were no books whatever except a cookbook and perhaps a Bible. Knowing that present day parents generally permit their children to attend movies of their own choice, it may be assumed that much of the remaining free time of the child is spent in movies, frequently Class B or Class C movies.

These are the children who will grow up not knowing how to use books, except insofar as one must make a limited use of books to get through the required number of years of school. The librarians of the future may need to start at a rather low level in teaching the students who enter a profession how to make use of library resources. For the student who does not like to read and has little skill in the use of books, much effort must be expended in making the library attractive in preparing displays designed to entice the student to look between the covers of the books displayed, in supplying direct assistance to the student in locating reference material, and in interpreting the material once it has been located.

If my identification of the groups which make use of hospital and medical and nursing school libraries has been correct, and if the needs of those in these three groups are as I have described them, the librarian has a complex task varying from that of enticing into the world of published material those whose steps are reluctant and faltering and assisting those who have limited skills and understandings relative to the use of library resources to providing more specialized skills to aid those who are the more sophisticated users of library resources, and playing an important supporting role to the producers of professional written materials.